

# Iowa's Salad Bowl

**W**hat goes into a salad? A hodge podge of ingredients — lettuce, tomatoes, maybe some onions, sprouts, sunflower seeds, cheese, carrots. Each part of a salad keeps its special flavor, but tossed together they make a great meal!

Iowa is like a big salad bowl. Iowans have varied backgrounds, families, ways of life, common interests, and traditions. Our histories are unique because we come from different places.

Another way to describe Iowa's salad bowl is that it is made up of different ethnic groups. Dictionaries define an ethnic group as "a group of people with similar traits, customs, and history." Think of all of the different kinds of ethnic groups that live in Iowa today — Native Americans, German-Americans, African-Americans, Irish-Americans, Danish-Americans, Lebanese-Americans, and Asian-Americans (just to name a few). Your ethnic roots are important in helping you understand who you are.

At the turn of the century, some historians called the United States (including Iowa) a giant melting pot. The melting pot became a symbol that represented America. Millions of people from all over the world came here, met, and became "Americans." Some people thought you

lost your own identity when you became an American just like the ingredients in a pot of stew — carrots, meat, potatoes, and onions — often become so blended that they lose their individual flavoring. Many **immigrants** [people who come to a new country to live] gave up many of their traditions such as native languages, clothing styles,

In this issue of *The Goldfinch*, we'll explore Iowa's ethnic roots. Why did people from different ethnic groups come to Iowa? What challenges have ethnic groups faced? How do they celebrate their



*Two Mesquakie girls pose with two visitors.*



*A Black American couple pose near their home.*

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*These two Amish children get a knitting lesson from their elders.*

ethnic heritage? We'll look at how the many peoples of Iowa have let go of some of their traditions and kept their most beloved.

## Why They Came

Long before Iowa opened to European-American settlement, Iowa was inhabited by Native Americans. The Sauk and Mesquakie lived along the Mississippi River. Moved by the federal government into Iowa from Illinois in 1831, they were again forced to move to

Kansas. In 1855, they bought land near Tama and returned to Iowa. Today the Mesquakie tribe still lives in what is known as the Mesquakie settlement.

Beginning in 1833, hundreds of thousands of people came from the eastern United States and from foreign lands to settle in Iowa. **Immigrants** of different ethnic groups came to Iowa for a variety of reasons. Most came for land and economic opportunities. Some groups such as Swedes came because they were unhappy with the Lutheran church. Throughout the 19th century, many Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Hollanders, and Britons came to America and Iowa to farm. For much of the 1800s, Iowa land cost only \$1.25 an acre. However, many people also came to start new businesses in Iowa.

## Coming As Families

Although some **immigrants** came as individuals, the majority came with other family members. In



*A Mexican-American mother and child in a migrant cottage on a farm near Muscatine*

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the 1850s, the typical male living in Central Iowa was married and between the ages of 25 and 45. The typical female was married and usually much younger than her husband. They had about five children.

Foreign-born people from Europe also came to Iowa in families. In the 19th century, thousands of families came from Germany, Scandinavia, Holland, and Great Britain. Sometimes a large group would immigrate and settle a new community. In 1847, about 800 people from Holland came to Marion County where they started the community of Pella. Many other communities were started by ethnic groups.

In the early 1880s, many African-Americans were recruited from Virginia to work in coal mining communities. Blacks also came to Iowa from other places in the South. They often wrote to relatives and friends back home, encouraging them to move north. Once here, many of the newcomers set up schools and churches.

## Later Immigrants

Little Maria Cano shivered in the autumn night air. She was with her mother and father, the only people on the West Liberty depot platform. They had just arrived from Minnesota where her parents had worked picking beets. Maria's parents had migrated from Mexico to Minnesota in 1927, hoping to find a better way to make a living. Many years of revolution in Mexico had caused thousands of Mexicans to leave their home country. When the beet picking season ended, the Cano family moved to Iowa City, where Maria grew up with her seven brothers and sisters. She went to school in Iowa City and became an interpreter at the University of Iowa



*A Pella girl celebrates Dutch traditions at the Pella Tulip Festival.*

Hospitals. Like Maria’s family many **immigrants** from Mexico have come to Iowa in the 20th century for work. The number of Mexican **immigrants** increased steadily between 1910 and 1930.

Iowa’s ethnic salad bowl is continuing to change. Southeast Asian **immigrants** began to come to Iowa in 1975 as refugees from the Vietnam War. Between 1980 and 1990 the percentage of black Iowans increased 15.3 percent. However, the biggest population jumps were Asians (+120.1 percent), Native Americans (+34.7 percent), and Hispanics (+27.8 percent). (Hispanic people are of Latin American or Spanish ancestry). In 1991, the Persian Gulf War has caused many people to leave the war-torn Middle East. New neighbors from such places may come to Iowa.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

